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THE NATURE OF THE LARES AND THEIR
REPRESENTATION IN ROMAN ART

*"Bina gemellorum quaerebam signa deorum
Viribus annosae facta caduca morae!
Mille Lares Geniumque ducis, qui tradidit illos,
Urbs habet, et vici numina trina colunt."*

—Ovid, *Fasti*, V, 143–146.

OVID's words may well serve as an introduction to one of the problems connected with the Lares. The poet represents himself as searching with increasing perplexity for the twin figures in which he had been accustomed to recognize the Lares. In their stead, he found innumerable groups composed of the two Lares Augusti with the Genius of Augustus between them. A Roman of earlier days, on the other hand, would have been equally surprised to find the number of the Lares restricted to two. In this paper I shall attempt a brief discussion of the reasons for the variations in the number of the Lares, and I shall also try to explain the differences in the representation of the Lares in Roman Art.

Following in the footsteps of De-Marchi,¹ Rohde,² Samter,³ von Domaszewski,⁴ and others, I regard, as the "original" Lar, the *Lar familiaris* in whom I recognize a good spirit, closely attached in each case to a particular family, to its dwelling, and to the territory immediately surrounding the house. The worship of this spirit, which centres in and about the family-hearth, contains many features which seem to point to a chthonic cult and which imply that the Lar was originally worshipped as the spirit of the ancestor who had founded the family and still watched with devotion over the fortunes of his descendants.

¹ *Il culto privato di Roma antica*, I, pp. 27 ff.

² *Psyche*, I, 1910, p. 254.

³ *Familienfeste der Griechen und Römer*, pp. 105 ff.; *Arch. Rel.* X, 1907, pp. 364 ff.

⁴ *Abh. zur römischen Religion*, p. 174.

Not only in the house but at the *compita*, or crossroads, another great centre for chthonic cults, these protecting spirits were worshipped. Here they were supposed to congregate in indefinite numbers, corresponding perhaps to the numbers of the adjoining estates.¹

The Roman community as a whole was protected by similar deities. These *Lares praestites* were represented as twin youths. Working retroactively, the state-Lares in their turn exercised influence upon the Lares of the *compita* and dualized also the *Lar familiaris*.² Between the twin Lares of the *compita*, after the reforms of Augustus, appeared the Genius of the Emperor. Lastly, between the twin Lares of the household was placed the Genius of the master of the house,³ in a few instances⁴ supplanted by the Genius of the Emperor.

As this view is directly opposed to that repeatedly expressed by Wissowa,⁵ I shall give briefly the chief objections raised by this great authority and the answers which I think may be made to them.

Wissowa's theory,—that the Lar is attached always to places, not persons; that he is in the beginning a spirit not of the family but of the farm,⁶ and especially of the boundaries of the farm represented by the cult of the crossroads; that he has no connections with the cult of ancestors or of the dead,⁷—is supported by the following considerations:

1. The comparatively late origin of the belief that the Lares represented the souls of dead ancestors. All our oldest references,

¹ In this connection, I am disposed to accept, against Samter, the conclusion of Wissowa (*Religion und Kultus der Römer*, (1912) p. 167 and note³) that the shrines discussed by Dolabella (*Grom. lat.* I, p. 302, 20 ff.) are identical with those of the Lares at the *compita*. These shrines are described as having entrances and altars corresponding to the number of estates adjoining.

² This change, it would appear from *Rudens*, 1207, must have occurred as early as Plautus; but cf. Jordan (*Annali*, 1872, p. 39) who places it after Pomponius (flor. 88 B.C.). Possibly the beginning of the development may be dated from Plautus, the complete change from Pomponius. Wissowa would assign it to the reforms of Augustus (*Arch. Rel.* VII, 1904, p. 48).

³ The Genius of the master had of course received worship by itself before Augustus. Cf. Plautus, *Captivi*, 290 ff.; De-Marchi, p. 75.

⁴ *Röm. Mitt.* V, 1890, p. 244; Mau-Kelsey, *Pompeii* (1907), p. 270.

⁵ Roscher, *Lex. d. Myth.* II, 2, s. v. *Lares*; *Arch. Rel.* VII, 1904, pp. 42 ff.; *Rel. u. Kult.* pp. 166 ff.

⁶ *Arch. Rel.* VII, pp. 49 and 56.

⁷ *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 174.

according to Wissowa, deal exclusively with the Lares as guardians of the farmer's fields.¹ Such are the prayers of the Arval brothers, the inscription on the *ara Consi* quoted by Tertullian, and the *devotio* of *Decius*. To the fields also belongs the oldest festival connected with the cult,—the Compitalia.

2. The difficulty of finding a place for the Lares in the house-cult and of distinguishing them in function from chthonic conceptions like the *di Manes* and the *di parentes*, or from Vesta, goddess of the hearth.²

3. The prominence given to slaves in the worship of the Lares,³ a prominence which Wissowa considers absolutely unthinkable if the origins of the cult are to be traced to the worship of ancestors.

In general, says Wissowa, the idea that the Lares were identical with the deified ancestors of Roman families did not prevail until the time of Varro.⁴ Wissowa himself however quotes Plautus, *Mercator*, 834, *di penates mēum parentum, familiai Lar pater*, as a passage seemingly at variance with his argument,⁵ but declares it contradicted by *Mercator*, 836,—*Ego mihi alios deos penates persequar, alium Larem, aliam urbem, aliam civitatem*, etc.

To say nothing of the possible comic effect which the lines may have been intended to have, as the speech of a desperate young man minded to attempt the all but impossible, it would doubtless be conceivable to a Roman audience that a man could, under certain exceptional circumstances, secure another Lar. Was it not accomplished in the ceremony of *adoptio*?⁶

As for the early references in the songs of the Arvals and in the *devotio* of *Decius*, Samter⁷ has proved the appropriateness of

¹ *Arch. Rel.* VII, pp. 48 f.

² *Arch. Rel.* VII, pp. 43 ff.

³ Roscher's *Lex. l. c.*, p. 1890.

⁴ *Arch. Rel.* VII, p. 42 and note.

⁵ *Lar familiaris* in this passage, as in the prologue to the *Aulularia*, is probably a translation of *ἡρως*. See Leo in *Hermes*, XLIII, 1908, p. 127. Wissowa would consider this equation as due, not to the fact that the Lar was an ancestral spirit, but to the gradual introduction of the Lar from the field to the house-cult. See *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 169.

⁶ If we choose, however, we may, following Samter (*Arch. Rel.* X, 1907, p. 372²), regard *Lar* as used metaphorically to mean simply "house," and thus procure a satisfactory climax,—*Larem, urbem, civitatem*.

⁷ *Arch. Rel.* X, p. 389; *Familienfeste*, p. 117.

calling on the Lares to protect and bless the Roman fields, since, if they represent the souls of deified ancestors, they were probably regarded as especially able, like other chthonic deities, to bring increase to the crops.¹ The same considerations apply of course to the inscription on the altar of the harvest-god Consus, and the efficacy of Decius's appeal to the Lares, if they were the souls of his ancestors, hardly needs comment. The appeal to the Lares among other divinities when the Arvals made an expiatory offering would be equally natural. To the meaning of the Compitalia I shall later recur.

Wissowa's well-known reluctance to turn for aid and analogies to the folklore of other peoples is partly responsible for his tendency to regard the Lar as attached exclusively to places, not to persons.

Examples drawn from the conduct of the house-spirits of Northern Europe are interesting because, although they illustrate just such fond devotion to the farm and the farmstead as Wissowa emphasizes in the case of the Lar, they also prove that the main object of attachment in such cases is not the house, but the family occupying it. Many of these tales rouse one's sympathy for the much-tried farmer who unsuccessfully endeavours to rid himself of a too-devoted house-spirit. At last, the family in desperation sets off for a new home, only to hear from one of the drays which bear their goods and chattels the triumphant cry of the brownie who has succeeded in accompanying them.² That in Roman belief also the Lar could be transferred with the family to a new home is proved by the well-known passage in *Trinummus*, 39 ff.³

Wissowa⁴ goes too far also in distinguishing between the Genius and the Lar on the ground that the Lar is never attached to persons so that expressions such as *Genio Marci nostri*, *Manes Silanorum*, etc., could never be used in connection with the Lares.

¹ Cf. Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen*, p. 174:—"Diese Ahnherrn hatten einst die Ackerflur ihres Fundus dem Walde abgerungen. Sie wirken fort als Schützer ihrer Flur."

² Cf. Grimm, *Deutsche Myth.* p. 424³.

³ See also Ovid, *Fast.* IV, 802; Tibullus, II, 5, 42; and Samter, *Familienfeste*, p. 108. Cf. Ralston, *Songs of the Russian People*, pp. 120 f.:—"When a Russian family moves from one house to another, the fire is raked out of the old stove into a jar and solemnly conveyed to the new one, the words, 'Welcome, grandfather, to the new home!' being uttered when it arrives."

⁴ *Arch. Rel.* VII, p. 56.

For not only the Lares Hostilii¹ and the Lares Volusiani,² but the Lares Augusti themselves show the possibility of attaching to the Lares a personal appellative.³

The Lar as the single deified founder of the family stands in a place apart, and easily distinguished from that occupied by the *di Manes*, the souls of the dead in general, and the *di parentes*, the dead descendants of the Lar.⁴ Neither is the function of the Lar comparable to that of Vesta, though as he makes his home in or near the hearth, there was undoubtedly a connection between him and the great goddess of the house-fire.⁵ It is noticeable, for instance, that both Servius and Romulus were supposed to be sons of the Lar by virgins. In the case of Servius, the maiden Ocrisia was offering sacrifice at the hearth of the palace when her destiny was revealed to her by the Lar in phallic form;⁶ in the case of Romulus, the punishment threatened the virgin is averted by Vesta who appears to the wrathful king of Alba in a dream.⁷ A somewhat similar story is told of Caeculus, founder of Praeneste, who was the son of a maiden impregnated by a spark from the hearth-fire.⁸ In this instance, we note the substitution (regarded by Wissowa as late and of

¹ Paulus, p. 102; cf. W. F. Otto, 'Mania und Lares,' *Arch. f. lat. Lex.* XV, 1908, p. 120.

² *C. I. L.* VI, 10266 f.

³ The plural in *Lares Hostilii* proves to Wissowa that the Lares here are not the ancestors of the *gens Hostilia*, but the Lares as attached to the estate of the Hostilii. (*Rel. u. Kult.* p. 169⁸.) But the plural may equally well be explained as the duplication of the *Lar familiaris* brought about by the worship of the Lares at the *compita*.

⁴ So the Lares do not receive worship on the Parentalia except at the Caristia or love-feast of the family, where they are undoubtedly present merely as family-gods, without connection with the dead. For, as Mommsen (*C. I. L.* I, 1, [ed. 2] 309) believes, the Parentalia belong to a late period when the dead were thought of as kindly and harmless beings, removed from the ordinary life of the family, and safely buried in their tombs. In considering such a festival, we are far distant from the epoch when the Lar was consciously regarded as an ancestor who dwelt beneath the hearth and must be carefully, at times even anxiously, propitiated.

⁵ In the *Aulularia*, 7 and 8, the person who entrusts his treasure to the Lar, *in medio foco defodit*.

⁶ Plutarch, *de fort. Rom.* 10; Dion. Hal. *Antiq. Rom.* IV, 2; Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 627-636; Pliny, *N. H.* XXXVI, 204; Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.* V, 18; and cf. Preller, *Röm. Myth.*³ II, p. 344.

⁷ Plutarch, *Vit. Rom.* 2.

⁸ Virgil, *Aen.* VII, 678 ff.; X, 544; Cato quoted by Schol. Veron, *ad Aen.* VII, 681; Servius, *ad Aen.* VII, 678; Solinus, II, 9.

Greek origin) of Vulcan for the Lar.¹ Pertinent also are the words of Pliny (*N. H.* XXVIII, 39): *fascinus . . . deus inter sacra Romana a Vestalibus colitur*.

Such stories bring into prominence one of the chief characteristics of the *Lar familiaris*,—his generative power. Here again a Roman tradition may be illuminated by foreign parallels.² In one of the instances quoted above, the hearth-god appeared in the form of a spark of fire, and the examples collected by Frazer³ show the wide prevalence of the belief in the procreative force of fire and of fire-spirits, and the universality of the idea that the hearth is the abode of deified ancestors. It is interesting also to note that in the Polish tale quoted by Grimm to illustrate the persistence of the household spirit in clinging to a particular family⁴ the name of the brownie is Iskrzycki, translated by Grimm as "*funke, feuerstein*," and he lives in the family-stove. In this he resembles his Russian relative, the Domovoi,⁵ and other house-spirits.

The unique privileges given to slaves in the cult of the Lares constitute no argument against the conception of the Lar as a deified ancestor. If the Roman encouraged slaves to worship their master's Genius, to make offerings in its honor, and to swear by it, he would surely see no objection to their sacrificing in honor of the Lar, who was regarded as so close in nature to the Genius that the two were even identified.⁶

Slaves, too, as Samter remarks,⁷ would be especially likely to take part in cults pertaining to the farmhouse and the kitchen, to which a large part of their activities would naturally be confined. In consonance with this assumption, Germanic house-spirits help especially in the work of the kitchen and stable. Like Milton's Lubber-fiend, the most illustrious of their clan, they toil for grooms and maids to "earn a cream-bowl duly set," keeping meantime, like the Lar of the *Aulularia*, a watchful eye on the treasures of the house.⁸

¹ This substitution appears as an alternative tradition in the legend of Servius.

² The universality of such beliefs is an argument against attributing the Roman traditions to a Greek origin, as Wissowa is inclined to do. See Otto, 'Mania u. Lares', p. 118.

³ *Golden Bough*³, II, pp. 221 ff.; 230 ff.

⁴ See p. 244, note 2.

⁵ Ralston, *Songs of the Russian People*, pp. 119 ff.

⁶ Censorinus, *de die natali*, III, 2.

⁷ *Familienfeste*, p. 119.

⁸ Grimm, *op. cit.* pp. 422 ff.

But the connection between the slaves of a Roman household and the Lares seems peculiarly significant. The mother of Servius Tullius was a slave; the mother of Romulus in the similar story was a handmaid, who was moreover forced to take the place of her reluctant mistress, the princess whom King Tarchetius had intended to be the bride of the phallic Lar.¹ The *vilicus* was forbidden to take part in religious rites except at the Compitalia or festival of the Lares.² Dionysius emphasizes the important position given to slaves at this time. The festival in fact was established by Tullius, the slave's son, who τοῖς . . . τὰ περὶ τῶν γειτόνων ἱερὰ συντελοῦσιν ἐν τοῖς προνωπίοις οὐ τοὺς ἐλευθέρους, ἀλλὰ τοὺς δούλους ἔταξε παρέναι τε καὶ συνιερουργεῖν, ὡς κεχαρισμένης τοῖς ἥρωσι τῆς τῶν θεραπόντων ὑπηρεσίας.³

On the night before the festival, woolen images representing the free members of the household and balls⁴ representing the slaves were hung up at the *compita* and before the house-doors as an offering to the Lares. The effigies and balls were intended, says Paulus,⁵ as a surrogate, *ut vivis parcerent et essent his pilis et simulacris contenti*. Macrobius⁶ adds that a sacrifice was originally made not only to the Lares but to Mania who, as Varro tells us,⁷ was the mother of the Lares. It was instituted by Tarquinius Superbus as a sacrifice of slaves *pro familiarium sospitate*; and, according to Macrobius, a gentler mode of celebration, involving the substitution of heads of garlic and poppy for human heads and the offering of images to Mania before the doors, was due to Junius Brutus.

At the Larentalia, a chthonic festival celebrated about the same time (December 23) at the grave of Acca Larentia, also identified by some scholars with the mother of the Lares,⁸ a mutilated note of Varro's⁹ informs us that a sacrifice was made to the spirits of dead slaves.

¹ Plutarch, *Vit. Rom.* 2.

² Cato, *de Agr.* V, 3. For the *vilica*'s offering to the Lares on Kalends, Nones, and Ides, cf. *de Agr.* CXLIII, 2.

³ *Antiq. Rom.* IV, 14.

⁴ That these *pilae* may themselves have been images is shown by Samter, *Arch. Rel.* X, p. 383³.

⁵ P. 239; cf. p. 121, 17.

⁶ *Sat.* I, 7, 34.

⁷ *Ling. Lat.* IX, 61.

⁸ The identification is strenuously opposed by Wissowa, in Pauly-Wissowa, s. v. *Acca*, pp. 133 f. It is supported by Müller-Deecke, Schwegler, Preuner, and Preller. See Wissowa's references, *l. c.*

⁹ *Ling. Lat.* VI, 24; *faciunt dis manibus servilibus sacerdotes*.

Finally, Acca Larentia herself shares in the taint of lowly birth, for she was supposed to have been a *meretrix*, forced, like the mothers of Romulus and Servius, to marriage with a god, in this instance Hercules.¹

Both the Larentalia and the Compitalia were, as von Domasewski has observed,² under the influence of the Saturnalia. Anxiety for the fate of the seed was mingled with awe and reverence for the dead who, themselves hidden beneath the earth, might forward or retard the growth of the crops. As in many other countries, a period of carnival magically aided by its freedom and license the development of plant life. Frazer has conjectured³ that the Saturnalia may have originated in an intercalary festival, regarded, like such festivals in general, as an unlucky season when the ordinary rules of life were inverted.

Curious reversals of regular custom marked at any rate the days of the Saturnalia. One of the most astonishing features of the festival was the liberty allowed to slaves. They took their masters' places, sat at table waited on by their lords, and assumed in the household all the dignity and power usually displayed by their owners.⁴ The same procedure marked the Cronia and other Greek festivals,⁵ and Dionysius seems to hint at something of the same sort by the following passage on the Compitalia: *ἦν ἔτι καὶ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐορτὴν ἄγοντες Ῥωμαῖοι διετέλουν ὀλίγαις ὕστερον ἡμέραις τῶν Κρονίων, σεμνὴν ἐν τοῖς πάνι καὶ πολυτελεῇ . . . καὶ φυλάττουσι τὸν ἀρχαῖον ἔθισμόν ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν, διὰ τῶν θεραπεόντων τοὺς ἥρωας ἱλασκόμενοι καὶ ἅπαν τὸ δοῦλον ἀφαιροῦντες αὐτῶν ἐν τοῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, ἵνα τῇ φιλανθρωπίᾳ ταύτῃ τιθασσεύμενοι μέγα τι καὶ σεμνὸν ἐχούσῃ χαριέστεροι γίνωνται περὶ τοὺς δέσποτας, καὶ τὰ λυπηρὰ τῆς τύχης ἥττον βαρύνωνται.*

When one remembers that during this same festival effigies were offered at the crossroads, a chthonic centre, to divert the attention of the Lares and Mania and cause them to spare the living,⁷ one is led to the conjecture that possibly slaves at this season were scapegoats for their masters and took for a brief

¹ Macr., *Sat.* I, 10, 11 ff.

² *Abh.* p. 174.

³ *Golden Bough*³, VI, p. 339.

⁴ Macrob. *Sat.* I, 7, 26; I, 24, 23; Horace *Sat.* II, 7, 4; Seneca, *Ep.* 47, 14.

⁵ Athen. XIV, 44 f., pp. 639 B, 640 A.

⁶ IV, 14.

⁷ Cf. the explanation given by Macrobius (I, 7, 31) of the *Sigillaria* used as presents during the Saturnalia.

hour their places and privileges, not for the reason given by the kindly Dionysius, but to give their lords a further chance to deceive the lurking spirits by satisfying them with humbler prey.¹

The offering of woolen effigies corresponding in number to the free inhabitants and of balls for the slaves of each household does not, of course, entail the ridiculous consequence suggested by Wissowa² that those who regard it as a surrogate must hold that originally all members of the household were sacrificed to the angry deities. The images were doubtless intended merely, like the beans of the Lemuria, to attract the attention of the spirits³ and divert them from their possible intention of seizing or harming some member of the family, each of whom was thus protected. An image might be a satisfactory substitute for a man. If, however, the precaution proved vain, then the disguise of the slaves as freemen might be of efficacy in deluding the denizens of the underworld, and a slave might be seized instead of his master. The sacrifice to the Manes of slaves is likewise explicable, if the slaves during this cycle of festivals were really representatives of their masters.

I hold, then, that none of Wissowa's objections to considering the Lares as the souls of ancestors is cogent.⁴ If the account of the development of the cult which I have suggested above is

¹ Many parallels might be adduced to illustrate the feeling of primitive peoples that dead ancestors, though a source of fertility and so of blessing, are also jealous spirits, liable to injure even their kindred. Cf. Frazer, *Belief in Immortality*, I, pp. 130, 153, 173, 247, 258, 298. The capriciousness of the modern brownie may perhaps show a survival of this belief.

² *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 167^b.

³ Often at similar festivals food is offered to spirits with a like propitiatory purpose. Cf. Schol. Aristoph. *Frogs*, 218, and J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, p. 201; Ralston, *op. cit.* p. 134.

⁴ One may query why, if the hearth or the space beneath it was associated, perhaps as an original burial-place, with the cult of ancestors, it was connected in worship with a single ancestor only, the *Lar familiaris*. To this one may answer that the *Lar familiaris* was rather the personification of the Ancestors embodied in the founder of the family, than an individual. It is to the *ius imaginum* that we must look for individualized ancestors. This is perhaps the reason why the word *Lar* meant to the Roman "house," "home," "family-traditions" as well as "family-god." The vagueness of the concept would explain also why the *Lar* so readily accepted pluralization. Even Plautus (*Rudens*, 1207) uses *Laribus familiaribus* in an inaccurate plural for all the gods venerated at the hearth.

So the Genius of the father of the family was the only Genius which received worship from all the members of the household, though each male had his own Genius. Similarly, too, the Russian Domovoi (Ralston, *op. cit.* p. 120) is

correct, we may draw an interesting parallel with the evolution of Hermes from a θεὸς μύχιος or ἐφέστιος to a θεὸς πυλαῖος and ἀγοραῖος and also to a θεὸς προπύλαιος and a θεὸς ἐπιτέρμιος.¹

Neither of the *Lar familiares* nor of the Lares in their other aspects as gods of the *compita* and protectors in general of the Romans and their city do we find representations in art until Greek influences have absorbed and modified the original conception.

There was, however, a well-established tradition² that an altar to the *Lares Praestites* had been founded in Rome as early as the days of Titus Tatius. Ovid³ and Plutarch⁴ both describe the ancient *signa* of the Lares, statues which despite their age, must, as Wissowa has shown,⁵ belong to a comparatively late period when the ancient open altar had been replaced by a temple and images after the Greek model. As neither Ovid nor Plutarch appear themselves to have seen the statues of the Lares, it is probably to Varro that we owe the description of them as two standing youths with a dog, also standing, between their feet. Plutarch adds that the Lares themselves were dressed in dog-skins. Both suggest as a reason for the presence of the dog the character of the Lares as guardians, and we may remember the attribution of a dog to Silvanus who is often closely connected and even confused with the Lares.⁶ Some authorities⁷

the chief representative of the ancestors, though in some districts the spirits of the dead usurp his functions. Among the Hereros (*Golden Bough*³, II, p. 221) the ancestral spirits at the hearth are often addressed in the plural; but, when a sick man is borne round the fire, his friends chant:

"See, Father, we have come here,
With this sick man to you,
That he may soon recover."

¹ M. B. Ogle, review of Eitrem, *Hermes u. d. Toten* (a work to which I regret that I have not had access) in *Am. Jour. Philol.* XXXI, 1910, pp. 93 ff.

² Varro, *Ling. Lat.* V, 74.

³ *Fasti*, V, 129 ff.

⁴ *Aet. Rom.* 51.

⁵ See Roscher's *Lexikon*, s. v. *Lares*, p. 1871.

⁶ *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 214. The dog also appears with the Dioscuri on Roman denarii of ca. 217–197 B.C. See Grueber, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*, I, p. 58. As the dog, however, is in frequent use as a symbol of the *gens Antestia* (p. 114), it is doubtful whether the denarii mentioned may not have been coined by a member of the *gens*, in which case the animal would have no particular connection with the Dioscuri.

⁷ Jevons, *Roman Questions*, Introduction, p. XLI, and Ehrlich, *Zeitschr. f. vergl. Sprachforsch.* XLI, 1907, p. 298.

even advance the theory that the Lares themselves were originally worshipped in the shape of dogs. No trace, however, of such a worship appears in the cult of the *Lares domestici*, and in general house-spirits are not symbolized by this animal.¹ The use of dogs in chthonic cults is on the contrary well attested, and when we remember that Hecate, goddess of the dead who gather at the crossroads, was represented as a dog,² and that dogs were sacrificed to Genita Mana,³ a goddess whose close relation to Mania and the Manes is undoubted, the presence of the dog with the *Lares praestites* seems clearly to indicate the chthonic side of their nature.⁴

On the reverse of coins of the *gens Caesia* (Fig. 1), issued 104 B.C., sit two youths draped round the waist and grasping spears. Between them is a dog and in the field is the inscription in monograms LARE, while above appear the head and tongs of Vulcan. Although evidently influenced by the ancient statues of the *Lares praestites*, these youths are seated instead of standing like the figures which Ovid described. The dog also sits, whereas in Ovid, *canis ante pedes saxo fabricatus eodem stabat*. The type of the Lares here is plainly Dioscuric.



FIGURE 1.—THE LARES: DENARIUS OF L. CAESIUS.

From the representation on the coins of the *gens Caesia* differ all other known artistic conceptions of the Lares. Bronze statues, altar-reliefs, Pompeian *lararia*, shrines at the *compita*, and wall-paintings unite in representing the Lares as curly-haired youths with high-girt tunics and boots. Their hands hold various attributes of peace and plenty, such as rhyta, paterae, horns of plenty, etc.

Of this type Friederichs further distinguishes two sub-classes.⁵ The youths of the first hold a cornucopia and patera, or, instead of the latter, wheat-ears (Fig. 2, A). The Lares in this group always appear clad in a chiton and mantle. In the second group, they pour liquid from a rhyton, held high in the right hand, into a patera or similar receptacle in the left hand (Fig. 2, B). They

¹ The cat, on the other hand, hence our "Puss in Boots," is frequent in this connection. See Grimm, *op. cit.* p. 416.

² Rohde, *Psyche*, II, p. 83³.

³ Plutarch, *Aet. Rom.*, 52.

⁴ See Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, p. 101.

⁵ *Berlins antike Bildwerke*, II, pp. 438 ff.

often wear the chiton only, and advance in pairs with a jovial dancing-step, whereas Class I shows a more quiet posture. Although the first class so markedly resembles the undoubted Lares of the second class, the attribution is not attested by inscriptions, and Wissowa's conjecture¹ that the single quiet



FIGURE 2.—STATUETTES OF LARES: A, PRE-AUGUSTAN TYPE; B, DANCING LAR.

figures may be *Lares familiares* of the pre-Augustan age therefore lacks proof.

Confining ourselves, then, to Class II and to the type seen on the coins of the *gens Caesia*, let us endeavor to decide (1) why the Lares were portrayed in forms which suggest the Dioscuri; (2) why this warrior-type is so much rarer than the other; and (3) what considerations influenced the choice of the commoner representation.

1. It was not unnatural that a connection between the Lares and the Dioscuri should occur to the Roman mind. The Dios-

¹ Roscher, *Lexikon*, s. v. *Lares*, p. 1894.

curi, like the Lares were, in one aspect, house-spirits,¹ although their guardianship was in general rather over the door than the hearth.² Door and hearth, however, are in folklore most intimately associated,³ and more than one bit of evidence may be adduced to prove the connection of the Lares with entrances.⁴

The chthonic aspect of the Dioscuri would also lead to their identification with the Lares, as would the belief in their efficacy as saviors and protectors both of individuals and of the state.

2. The reason for the choice of another type to represent the Lares may well have been the danger of confusion with the Penates whose statues in the state shrine on the Velia, as described by Dionysius⁵ prove their artistic affinity to the Twin Brethren. Judging from the coins of C. Antius Restio⁶ and of the Sulpicii and Fonteii,⁷ the resemblance was even closer than in the case of the Lares. If Wissowa's conjecture,⁸ that in Tusculum also the Penates of the community were represented as Dioscuri, be

¹ See Nilsson, *Griechische Feste*, p. 419: "Die Dioskuren sind aber keine Götter bestimmter Geschlechter; ihre Kult ist vielmehr ein Hauskult, zu dem jedermann die gleiche Berechtigung hatte. Damit stimmt die Form des Opfers, denn auch die Theoxenien sind ein Opfer. Den Hausgeistern wird ihre Nahrung von den Hausgenossen dargebracht; man wird versucht die Hauskobilde des germanischen Glaubens und die ihnen vorgesetzten Mahle zu vergleichen."

² They are, however, sometimes termed 'Εφέστιοι. See Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, p. 1237.

³ For a possible explanation, see Trumball, *Threshold Covenant*, p. 22.

⁴ Several Pompeian houses show traces of *lararia* or similar shrines near the entrance. So Mau (*Röm. Mitt.* VIII, 1893, p. 7; see also p. 9, casa c; Overbeck⁴, p. 315; *Gior. degli Scavi*, 1870, p. 10) notes of a house in Pompeii without compluvium or impluvium that immediately to the right on entering the door was a low altar with traces of fire, while above was a niche in the wall for the Lares. An interesting passage from St. Jerome (*In Esaiam* c. 57, Vol. III, p. 418, ed. Bened.) proves for late antiquity the presence of statues of the goddess Tutela at the entrances both of private houses and of insulae. This goddess appears occasionally (*C. I. L.* II, 4082; *Eph. Epig.* IX, 440) with the Lares, and in such cases is evidently a deification of their protecting power. It is possible that Propertius, IV (V), 8, 50, may refer to a shrine of the Lares at or near an entrance. It should be noted that the first part of the passage from Jerome, though used by De-Marchi, Marquardt and Mommsen to prove the presence of the Lares near the entrance, refers, as the context shows, to the Israelites and can only by inference be applied to the Romans.

⁵ I, 68.

⁶ Babelon, *Monnaies de la Répub. rom.* I, p. 155, No. 2.

⁷ Ibid. II, p. 471; I, p. 503.

⁸ 'Die Überlieferung über die röm. Penaten,' *Hermes*, XXII, 1887, p. 32.

correct, the very ancient interest of Tusculum in the Dioscuri would argue for the early adoption of the type there. It may therefore have seemed to the Romans that the Penates had, as it were, a prior right to identification with the Dioscuri, and that, as confusion existed, another equation for the Lares must be found.

An existing type was apparently ready at hand, for a fragment of the *Tunicularia* of Naevius¹ recalls the painter *Theodotum compellas* [*compella* Scaliger] . . . *qui aras Compitalibus sedens in cella circumtectuas tegetibus Lares ludentis peni pinxit bubulo*. If the usual interpretation of this passage is correct,² even before the time of Naevius the Lares were represented in some such jovial guise as their later Pompeian brethren present. It was, of course, just at this period that attempts to equate Greek and Roman divinities began to be frequent.

The usual explanation is that given by Wissowa,³ that the so-called "dancing Lares" are derived from a late Greek type of Bacchus probably common in South Italy in Naevius's day.

We may note first that the figures of the Lares do not so much resemble the ordinary conceptions of Dionysus as they do those of members of the wine-god's train. Friederichs⁴ has remarked the subordinate character of the "dancing Lares" and the way in which they group themselves on either side of the Genius as the main figure. Now if the idea of the evolution of the Lares presented in this article is correct, they were not at first subordinated to the Genius or any other divinity, but appeared in indefinite numbers at the *compita* as protectors of the adjoining estates and as representing the cult of the ancestors. It was not, indeed, until after the reforms of Augustus that the Genius became common as the central figure. Whence, then, their peculiar lack of independence?

It is not likely to have been a later development, derived from association with the Genius, for the type, if we may trust Naevius, was an early one.

A study of the Dioscuri, such as I have previously attempted,⁵

¹ Ribbeck, *Com. frag.* 99 ff.

² A different interpretation is given by Ehrlich, *Ztschr. f. vergl. Sprachf.* XLI, 297 f.

³ 'Monumenta ad religionem Romanam spectantia tria,' *Ann. dell' Inst.* 1883, pp. 159 f.; *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 172.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 439.

⁵ *A. J. A.* XXIII, 1919, pp. 1 ff.

shows that pairs of divinities are quite likely to be subordinated to a central and more important god. Does the explanation of our problem lie in the influence of the other class of Lares, already equated with the Dioscuri? In favor of this answer would be the fact that the "dancing Lares" are two in number like those on the coins of the *gens Caesia*, where the influence of the Dioscuri is apparent. We might then see a sort of transition-type in the statue of a dancing youth in the Louvre¹ who is clothed in a skin tunic, girt apparently with an animal's tail. He holds in his right hand a rhyton terminating in a dog's head and in his left a patera. Longpérier identifies the bronze as a Lar, though, as in the case of many similar figures, there is no inscription to assure us as to the intention of the sculptor.

But if this conjecture is justified, why was the Dionysiac type chosen for the Lares? Wissowa's idea that the Lares in this aspect are heralds of the mirthful Compitalia is hardly applicable. In fact his inference as to the joyousness of the Compitalia is not supported by his references.²

A more profitable line of investigation would seem to be the study of a possible relation between the Lares and Liber, originally a *Genius genialis*, embodying the concept of creative fullness.³ In the cult of Liber, as in the traditions associated with the *Lar familiaris*, the phallus played an important part; Liber, like the Lares, received worship at the crossroads;⁴ and the later merging of Liber and the Greek Dionysus might foreshadow the type of the "dancing Lares." The number and subordinate character of the "dancing Lares" would, according to this supposition, be derived from connection with the Dioscuri; the type from the resemblance in nature between the Lares and Dionysus-Liber.

Much more satisfactory, however, would be a derivation which should include the two elements. If we could find a pair of Greek deities of subordinate character, who might be represented in a

¹ Longpérier, *Notice des bronzes antiques*, p. 103, no. 464; Daremberg et Saglio, s. v. *Diphthera*, fig. 2451.

² *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 167^b. Even if we grant that such a phrase as *uncta Compitalia* (Virg., *Catal.* XIII, 27) points to a lavish and therefore joyous banquet, we must acknowledge, as Samter points out (*Arch. Rel.* X, 1907, pp. 384 f.), that a noisy feast is, even in modern times, by no means incompatible with a celebration in honor of the dead.

³ *Rel. u. Kult.* p. 120; see Reifferscheid, *Annali*, 1863, p. 134.

⁴ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VII, 21.

guise suggesting a Dionysiac type; if we could prove that these deities resembled the Lares in function to an extent sufficient to warrant identification; and, finally, if we could show that these divinities were known in Italy about the time of the Hannibalic War, we might with a fair degree of probability assume the derivation from them of the "dancing Lares."

These specifications are, I think, fulfilled by the Cabiri or Megaloi Theoi.¹ The cult attained a great reputation in Rome even in Republican times, as is shown by the offering made at Samothrace by Marcellus, conqueror of Syracuse.² The widespread identification in the Hellenistic period of the Samothracian Cabiri and the Dioscuri combined with the stories of Aeneas to produce the Roman equation Cabiri=Dioscuri=Penates. As we have seen, the Penates in their shrine in the Velia were portrayed as Dioscuri, and the inscription in the temple described them, like the Cabiri, as *Magni di*.³

This particular type of Dioscuri-Cabiri, though chosen also for the Lares, could not, I have concluded, persist because of the inevitable confusion which would arise between the Lares and the Penates.

But there were many other Cabiric cults beside that on Samothrace, and the surprising variations which occur in the other centres were combined with true eclecticism by Roman worshippers. So in an inscription⁴ found on Imbros the dedicant, a Roman as Bloch has observed, has heaped upon the Cabiri a singular jumble of complimentary epithets:

Θεοὶ μεγάλοι | θεοὶ δυνατοὶ | ισχυροὶ καὶ | Κασμεῖλε | ἄναξ Πάτ[εκ]οι⁵
Κοῖος | Κρείος Ὑπερείων | Εἰλαπετός | Κρόνος.

The inscription produces, as Keil⁶ well remarks, the effect of an Orphic prayer,—an effect which is increased by comparison with Orphic fragment VIII:

τίκτει ἡ γῆ . . . παῖδας . . . ἄλλους τοσούτους,
Κοῖον τε Κροῖον τε μέγαν, Φόρκυν τε κραταίον,
καὶ Κρόνον, Ὀκεανόν θ', Ὑπερίονα τ', Ἰαπετόν τε.

¹ The identification of the Lares with the Curetes and of these with the Cabiri was frequent in antiquity. See Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, pp. 1178, 1236.

² Plutarch, *Marc.* 30. For further evidence see *I.G.* XII, 8, pp. 38 ff.

³ Serv. *ad. Aen.* III, 12.

⁴ See Bloch in Roscher, *Lexikon*, s. v. *Megaloi Theoi*, p. 2533.

⁵ Friedrich reads πᾶτ[ρι]οι. See Kern, in *Pauly-Wissowa*, s. v. 'Kabeiros und Kabeiroi,' p. 1410.

⁶ *Philologus*, suppl. 2, p. 601.

In harmony with this impression is the fact that on Samothrace the two Cabiri were often regarded as Dionysus and Zeus,¹ while at times Dionysus was called "son of the Cabir."² In Thebes, too, Dionysus was the centre of the cult.³

At Lemnos, on the other hand, perhaps the most ancient home of the Cabiri, they were represented as subordinate protecting spirits, guardians especially of the vintage.⁴ These Lemnian Cabiri are introduced by Nonnus (*Dionys.* XIV, 17 ff.) into the army of Dionysus. On this island the chief Cabir was Hephaestus who seems also to have been recognized as one of the Cabiri of Samothrace.⁵

A Cabir represented with the attributes of this Lemnian Hephaestus would suggest a Dionysiac type,⁶ as is evident from the coins of Thessalonica, some of which,⁷ with the inscription KABEIPOΣ, show on the obverse the head of a laureate youth r., with a hammer on his left shoulder, while others⁸ display on the reverse a youth similarly inscribed, standing l., clothed in a short chiton or *exomis*, with a rhyton in his right hand and a hammer or double-axe in his left (Fig. 3).

Although all the evidence from Thessalonica is of late origin, there are indications that the cult itself was ancient.⁹ At any rate, types of the sort represented on these Macedonian coins



FIGURE 3.—CABIR: COIN OF THESSALONICA.

¹ Schol. Apoll. Rh. I, 917; *Etym. Gud.* 289, 20; *Etym. Magn.* 482, 27.

² Cic., *De Nat. Deorum*, III, 58; Ampel. 9; Lydus, *de mens.* 4, 51 (ed. Wuensch).

³ Kern, *Arch. Anz.* 1893, p. 129.

⁴ Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, pp. 1207 ff.

⁵ Herod. III, 37; Bloch, *l. c.* p. 2525; but cf. Kern, *Pauly-Wissowa*, s. v. 'Kabeiros und Kabeiroi,' pp. 1422, 1427.

⁶ For abundant references to prove the close connection between Hephaestus and Dionysus, see R. Pettazzoni, 'Le origini dei Kabiri nelle isole del Mar Tracio,' *Mem. R. Accad. dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filolog.*, Serie V, XII, 1909, pp. 717 f. This is not the place to discuss the reason for the resemblance between the Cabir, Dionysus, and Hephaestus. This resemblance I believe to be fundamental and due to the development of the three divinities from a common origin.

⁷ E. g. Mionnet, *Description de médailles antiques*, I, p. 491, no. 303; cf. Suppl. III, p. 119, no. 743.

⁸ *Brit. Mus. Cat. of Coins, Macedonia, Thessalonica*, p. 113, 47 (Imperial).

⁹ See below, p. 258, note 6 and Cook, *Zeus*, I, pp. 104 ff.

suggest a possible origin for the Dionysiac Lares, and I would add the further suggestion that many of the quiet standing figures, which in dress and attributes resemble the Lares but lack inscriptions to make the attribution certain, may in reality be Cabiri. The singleness of these figures, influenced, if my supposition be correct, by the type of the single Cabir, may have appealed to the Romans as a congenial reminiscence of the original *Lar familiaris*.

In discussing the possible effect of Dionysus-Cabir upon the Lares, we may remember, too, that in the tale of Attus Navius¹ the shrine of the Lares is in a vineyard and grapes are offered to them, and that Liber, who like Dionysus was called son of the Cabir, was himself sometimes numbered among the Cabiri.²

With the Cabiri or Corybantes of Macedonia was associated a piteous story which bears undoubted resemblance to the Orphic tale of Zagreus. Christian propagandists³ recited with horror the murder by two brothers of a third, identified with Dionysus by Clement, and the burial of the victim at the foot of Mount Olympus. In Clement's version, the head only received burial; the *membrum virile* was transported by the murderers to Etruria.⁴

With this story in mind, it is interesting to note the tripling of the Dioscuri-type which occurs frequently on Etruscan mirrors.⁵ Whether in such cases the three youths are in truth a reminiscence of similar Greek groups of the three Cabiri we may leave doubtful.⁶ That some knowledge of the Theban and Samothracian cult-legends was current in Etruria seems proved from the mirror (Gerhard, pl. CXXXVIII) where Prometheus sits on his rock between "Castur" and "Calinice" who hold in their hands the symbol of the Titan's punishment,⁷ the iron ring⁸

¹ Cic. *De Div.*, I, 31; Dion. Hal., III, 70.

² Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, p. 1208.

³ Firm. Mat., *De Err. Prof. Rel.* 11; Clem. Alex., *Protr.* II, 19, 1-4, p. 15, 1 ff. (ed. Stählin).

⁴ For a connection between the Tarquins and the gods of Samothrace, see Macr. III, 4, 7.

⁵ E. g. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, pl. LV.

⁶ The mirrors may indicate the ancient origin of the cult-legend told by Clement and the other propagandists in regard to the Cabir of Thessalonica.

⁷ Welcker, *Trilogie*, p. 51; Kern, *Arch. Anz.* p. 130; Serv. in *Virg. Ecl.* VI, 42; Pliny, *N. H.* XXXVII, 2.

⁸ Two rings according to Cook (*Zeus*, I, p. 328⁹); a ring and gem according to Terzaghi (Milani, *Stud. e mat.* III, p. 213).

which was one of the distinctions of the *mystae* of Samothrace.¹ At any rate, the common occurrence in Etruria of the so-called Cabiric mirrors would increase the probability that the Romans also were familiar with groups in which two youths resembling the Dioscuri surrounded a third, more prominent, figure.

On many mirrors,² furthermore, one of the "Dioscuri" appears with the inscription Laran. Etymological connection between Laran and Lares has been affirmed by Corssen.³ The possibility of an equation made by the Romans, justified or not justified by etymology, is strengthened by the comparison which Thulin has undertaken between Martianus Capella's account of the wedding of Mercury and Philology where the gods are divided among sixteen different regions of the heavens, and the names of divinities on the bronze liver of Piacenza.⁴

Martianus, I, 46 reads:—*In secunda itidem mansitabant praeter domum Iovis, quae ibi quoque sublimis est, ut est in omnibus praediatus, Quirinus Mars, Lars militaris; Iuno etiam ibi domicilium possidebat, Fons etiam, Lymphae diique Novensides.* The same conjunction of the Lares with Mars, Fons, and Juno is noticeable in the *lustrum missum* of the Arval Brothers.⁵

In the corresponding position to the *Lar militaris* on the bronze liver appears the Etruscan *leθn* or *leθam*, a deity for whose association with Laran see *Etruskische Spiegel*, V, p. 12. The mirror referred to was seen by Corssen, who describes the figures upon it as almost destroyed. He was able to decipher the inscriptions *Uni, Menrva, Tinia, leθam, Laran, . . . arna*,—which prove the scene to have been the Birth of Menrva-Athena.

If one tries to explain the presence of *Leθam* = *Lar militaris* in a birth-scene, one is led to remember the frequent appearance on similar mirrors of the Dioscuri at the birth of Minerva. As the Dioscuri resembled in type the Lares, it seems likely that *Leθam* = Dioscur. But on the mirrors Laran also appears as

¹ Lucretius, VI, 1044; Pliny, *N. H.* XXXIII, 23. The story of Prometheus, as Kern remarks, is traceable to Lemnos where, it will be remembered, an inscription in a language seemingly akin to Etruscan has been discovered. Proof of the worship of the Cabiri among the Etruscans may also be derived from Dion. Hal. II, 22, 2.

² Gerhard, *Pls.* CCLV, c; LIX, 2; CCLVII, c, 1; XC; CCLXXXIV, 1 and 2; Vol. V, p. 12; pl. 84, 2.

³ *Sprache d. Etr.* I, p. 252.

⁴ C. Thulin, *Götter d. Martianus Capella*, pp. 42 ff.

⁵ See Pauly-Wissowa, s. v. *Arvales Fratres*, pp. 1481 f.

a Dioscuric type, and therefore Laran may equal *Lar militaris*.¹

The chthonic nature of the Cabiric cults, particularly on Lemnos and Samothrace, the legends involving the Cabiri and Hecate, goddess of the crossroads,² and the connection of Dionysus with the cult of the dead may have contributed to the assimilation of the Lares and the Magni Di.

Among the features of the Samothracian worship were solemn dances in stately measure.³ Such dances are appropriate to all deities of fertility, such as the Lares.⁴

If, as Wissowa considers, the legends of Ocrisia and similar tales, which give Vulcan as an alternative for the *Lar familiaris*, are of late origin and due to Greek influence, we may trace to the same influence the head and pincers of Vulcan above the Lares on the coins of the *gens Caesia*, not regarding these symbols with Fowler⁵ merely as a moneyer's mark, but as derived from the connection of the Cabiric type with Hephaestus.⁶

When the abuses of the *collegia compitalicia* led to the reforms of Augustus, the emperor's conservatism would induce him to change as little as possible the form in which the *Lares Compitales* already existed. To avoid confusion with the Penates, the Dionysiac type must be favored for the new Lares, rather than the Dioscuric type. But if Augustus were familiar with Etruscan representations of the Dioscuri or Cabiri grouped as *paredroi* on either side of a third more prominent brother, the possibilities which lay in imitating such a group would appeal to him.

The association of the story of the three Cabiri with the Zagreus-myth, the worship accorded the third brother,⁷ and the

¹ We recall too that the tales of the phallic Lar and Ocrisia were localized in the palace of the Etruscan king, Tarquinius Priscus.

² On Samothrace, the Cabiri purify Hecate from sin (Schol. Theoc., *Id.* II, 12). See Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, p. 1215, and Immisch in Roscher's *Lexikon*, s. v. *Kureten*, p. 1620.

³ Stat., *Achill.* II, 157; Conze, *Reise auf den Inseln des thrakischen Meeres*, pl. 12; *Neue Untersuchungen*, pl. 9; Rubensohn, *Mysterienheiligtümer v. Eleus. u. Samothr.* p. 133.

⁴ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁵ *Roman Festivals*, p. 351.

⁶ On a bronze coin of Claudius Gothicus (Cohen, *Monn. imp.*² VI, 137, 65) the Cabir bears a hammer and tongs; cf. H. von Fritze, 'Birytis u. die Kabiren auf Münzen', *Z. Num.* XXIV, 1904, p. 126, and *B.C.H.* XIX, 1895, p. 110, n. 2.

⁷ Firmicus, *l. c.*: *Hunc eundem Macedonum colit stulta persuasio. Hic est Cabirus, cui Thessalonicensenses quondam cruento cruentis manibus supplicabant.*

fact that the Roman Lares were the heroized dead would all facilitate the apotheosis of the Genius which Augustus inserted between the gods of the crossroads, and lead by rapid yet imperceptible steps to the deification of the Emperor.

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